

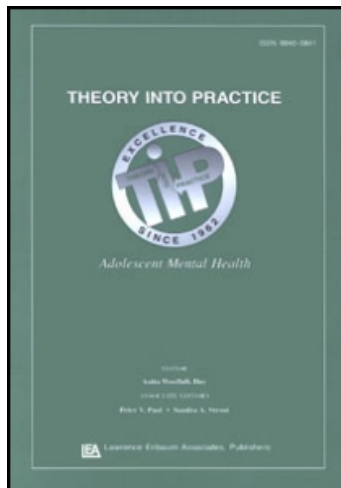
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Talking About Reading as Thinking: Modeling the Hidden Complexities of Online Reading Comprehension

Julie Coiro^a

^a University of Rhode Island, Quaker Hill, Connecticut

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Julie Coiro

Talking About Reading as Thinking: Modeling the Hidden Complexities of Online Reading Comprehension

This article highlights four cognitive processes key to online reading comprehension and how one might begin to transform existing think-aloud strategy models to encompass the challenges of reading for information on the Internet. Informed by principles of cognitive apprenticeship and an emerging taxonomy of online reading comprehension strategies, I introduce think-aloud instructional models for explicitly teaching students how expert readers approach, interact with, monitor their understanding of, and respond to online information texts. Over time, think-aloud strategy lessons in online reading environments help students recognize, label, and define a range

of more and less familiar online cueing systems and related reading purposes. In turn, students can begin to actively consider additional strategies for effectively comprehending and using the range of informational texts they encounter on the Internet.

Julie Coiro is an assistant professor at the University of Rhode Island, Quaker Hill, Connecticut.

Companion Web site for screenshot images and guided practice sections of both think-aloud lessons: <http://sites.google.com/site/tiponlinethinkaloudlessons/>

Correspondence should be addressed to Professor Julie Coiro, University of Rhode Island, 3 Rainbow Court, Quaker Hill, CT 06375. E-mail: jcoiro@snet.net

IN HER ARTICLE TITLED “Two Birds With One Stone: Teaching Reading and Teaching Thinking,” Lena Green (2005) explained how learning to read enhances the thinking process, and learning to think enhances the reading process. Consequently, when educators explicitly teach reading and thinking as mutually reinforcing processes, gains can occur in both dimensions. From Green’s perspective, the teaching of thinking involves teaching students about planning, problem-solving, and metacognitive awareness, which she defined as “the conscious choice and systematic practice of thinking processes to suit the demands of particular situations”

(p. 117). Green argued that all readers can become more metacognitively aware during their reading experiences with explicit models of the thinking that occurs while constructing meaning from text and integrating it with their own prior knowledge.

So, what key processes do skilled readers consciously use when comprehending text? Research has confirmed that proficient readers actively construct meaning from offline (or printed) text using a set of strategic processes such as previewing the text, setting goals, making predictions, asking questions, monitoring understanding, and making connections (Block & Pressley, 2002; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). As readers transition to Internet reading environments, emerging work suggests these traditional reading and thinking strategies are necessary, but not sufficient, to successfully navigate and make sense of online informational texts (Afflerbach & Cho, 2008; Coiro, 2007; Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004). A reader's level of metacognitive awareness about which strategies are best suited to locate, critically evaluate, and synthesize diverse online texts is likely to foster a deeper understanding of the texts they encounter on the Internet.

Importantly, some students will not improve their use of metacognitive strategies without explicit training in the reading and thinking processes required to read offline and online texts for specific purposes (Block, 2004; Castek, 2008). One solution is for teachers to provide explicit think-aloud models of effective reading and thinking strategy use. A think-aloud is a technique in which the teacher pauses while reading to verbally model the thought processes of a skilled reader as he or she interacts with a text (Davey, 1983). Informed by an instructional approach known as cognitive apprenticeship (Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1990), teachers can use think-aloud models to support readers by engaging them in authentic problem-solving activities while calling attention to often overlooked or hidden comprehension strategies that are useful in particular reading situations. Over time, learners are encouraged to gradually take on more responsibility as they internalize the hidden reading and thinking processes and eventually carry out

important reading tasks more independently (see Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). Highly focused and well-planned strategy think-alouds can provide readers of all ages with a common language for sharing important metacognitive strategies that facilitate comprehension (Wilhelm, 2001).

Previous work provides excellent models of how think-aloud strategy instruction might be used to scaffold students as they read printed offline texts (e.g., Baumann, Jones, & Seifert-Kessell, 1993; Block & Israel, 2004; Lapp, Fisher, & Grant, 2008). However, with the exception of Kymes' (2005) brief think-aloud examples that compare offline and online reading comprehension strategy use, few published think-aloud models focus specifically on how teachers might support readers during challenging Internet reading experiences. This article, guided by an emerging taxonomy of reading comprehension strategies adolescents use to solve online information tasks (see Leu et al., 2008), builds on existing models of think-aloud strategy instruction in nondigital texts to make explicit the particular reading and thinking strategies useful when reading across search engine results, informational Web sites, and a networked set of primary and secondary sources written from multiple points of view. In the space remaining, I briefly outline key elements of an online reading plan used to frame a think-aloud model of online reading instruction; explain the benefits of situating online reading instruction in curriculum-based information challenges; and offer two think-aloud examples that might be used with adolescents seeking answers to a pair of online information challenges in a language arts or history class.

Framing Think-Aloud Lessons in an Online Reading Plan

One key component of any apprenticeship approach to teaching reading involves breaking the problem or task into manageable parts (Collins et al., 1990). With this in mind, one effective way to structure think-aloud lessons in online reading comprehension is to frame the process in a four-stage flexible online reading plan:

1. *Approaching online reading tasks.* Skilled readers approach online reading tasks with a problem-solving mindset that prompts them to determine their purpose, anticipate the challenges, and make a flexible plan. Taking time to generate a focused plan of attack before navigating their mouse across the computer screen helps online readers steer clear of the myriad distractions they are bound to encounter as they read for information on the Internet.
2. *Navigating and negotiating online texts.* Skilled online readers move through a complicated process of navigating search engines and disparate Web site structures and negotiating multiple modes of information and a diverse range of perspectives. This process involves strategies for determining important ideas, judging the relevance of those ideas in relation to their purpose, investigating author credentials, detecting author agendas, and corroborating questionable claims.
3. *Monitoring comprehension of and pathways through online texts.* At several points in the online inquiry process, skilled readers stop to revisit their purpose while monitoring both their understanding of the content and the relevance of their chosen reading path. Online readers apply fix-up strategies to help them reread, refocus, adjust their speed or direction, or clarify their understanding before they move on.
4. *Responding to online texts.* Skilled online readers are often actively engaged in reciprocal acts of reading, writing, and reflecting. This interactive response process typically involves summing up key ideas, making connections, looking deeper, asking questions, and contributing their own ideas in response to the posed challenge.

Situating Online Reading Instruction in a Curriculum-Based Information Challenge

Another key aspect of cognitive apprenticeship involves providing students with varying

kinds of authentic practice situations so they learn how to flexibly apply a range of reading and thinking processes in new settings (Collins et al., 1990). Teachers who design these practice situations should keep in mind that students are motivated by authentic and intentional reading purposes that are situated in the context of interesting texts (Guthrie, Wigfield, & Perencevich, 2004). In addition, students in offline (Guthrie & Cox, 2001) and online reading environments (Castek, 2008) are more likely to transfer what they learn from strategy instruction to new informational texts when it is embedded within inquiry activities with content-specific goals. Consequently, rather than teaching online reading and thinking strategies as part of an isolated technology lesson, small groups of students are presented with content-related information problems, or online information challenges (see Leu et al., 2008), designed both to develop conceptual knowledge and elicit important online reading comprehension skills. As part of these information challenges, students are invited to use a range of Internet technologies to locate, navigate, negotiate, and respond to online informational texts linked directly to a particular content theme or learning objective.

For example, the think-aloud examples illustrated in the following are framed within two information challenges related to Japanese American internment, an important topic that profoundly influenced the United States during World War II, but one that is rarely covered in any depth in most U.S. history textbooks (Ogawa, 2004). The first lesson (see Table 1) focuses on *reading efficiently* within search engine results and informational Web sites to locate a specific answer to this information challenge: How many individuals of Japanese descent were moved to relocation centers during World War II? The second lesson (see Table 2) focuses on *reading critically* across five diverse online sources while responding to this challenge: How do different authors portray the Japanese internment camp experience to readers? Both lessons prompt interaction with a wide range of primary and secondary online sources written from multiple points of view. In addition, both lessons

Table 1
Example of a Think-Aloud Lesson Teaching Adolescents How to Read Efficiently
to Locate Specific Online Information

Texts	Teacher Commentary During the Think-Aloud	Strategies Modeled/Practiced
Lesson 1: Reading Efficiently to Locate Specific Online Information Challenge: How many individuals of Japanese descent were moved to relocation centers during World War II?		
MODEL		
Google Docs page with task directions and chart to fill in (Fig. 1) Search box at the Google homepage (Fig. 2)	Approach: Teacher [reads the task directions in Fig. 1]: First, I'm going to read the question and figure out what kind of problem I need to solve. The question begins with "how many individuals," so I'm looking for a specific number of people, which I might be able to find in one location. I might find this kind of information in a government report or historical database, so I'll keep that in mind as I skim the search results. Some other important words in the question are Japanese and relocation centers. I think I will go to a search engine and type in these keywords: how many Japanese in relocation centers [see Fig. 2]. Of course, I'll probably get a really long list of search results, so there's a good chance I'll find more than one answer. I think I'll try to find the answer in a few different locations and then combine the answers from the most reliable sources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Determining a purpose• Making a plan• Anticipating challenges
Google search results with eight annotated entries (Fig. 3)	Navigate and Negotiate: [Types in search words, clicks search, and scans search results shown in Fig. 3]: Before I click anywhere, I'm going to scan down the list and see what might be worth reading. The bold words tell me most of the results have something to do with Japanese relocation centers, so that's good. The description in the first link for www.infoplease.com actually reports a number, so that looks promising. If I scan further down the search list, I can use the Web site addresses like context clues to get information about who sponsors the site. I see there is a Wikipedia page (en.wikipedia.org), two government Web sites (archives.gov and nps.gov), a museum (www.sfmuseum.org), and a digital library at an educational institution (www.digital.lib.usu.edu), so most of the sources appear to be reliable at first glance. I'll start with the first link because it provides a specific number, and then see how that number compares to information at some of the other locations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Determining important ideas• Evaluating relevance of information in search engine results• Evaluating potential reliability of information in search results
Infoplease Web page for Japanese relocation centers (Fig. 4) and Google Docs page with task directions (Fig. 1)	Monitor: [Clicks on first link to Infoplease.com website shown in Fig. 4 and scans/reads]: Wow—this page reports a lot of numbers right at the top of the page. [Toggles back to Google Docs task page—Fig. 1]. After I reread my question, I am reminded that I'm looking for how many people, not how many camps. I notice a few paragraphs down, they report the number of Canadian Japanese sent to internment camps in British Columbia. That's interesting, but it doesn't really answer my question, so I won't need to report that number here. After skimming, I find that this source claims 120,000 Americans were sent to US internment camps. But, before I just take their word for it, I'm going to learn a little more about who made this Web site to get a sense of how trustworthy they are.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rereading to clarify task• Constructing meaning
Infoplease Web page (Figs. 5–7)	Navigate and Negotiate: [Teacher models how to read at different locations within the Infoplease.com Web site for author/sponsor information to determine the source's trustworthiness] View corresponding think-alouds for this portion of the lesson at: http://sites.google.com/site/tiponlinethinkaloudlessons/lesson1-think-aloud	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Refer to online table for list of strategies practiced in this phase
Google Docs chart with first row completed (Fig. 8)	Monitor and Respond: [Toggles to the Google Docs window shown in Fig. 1 and completes each column with the appropriate information]	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Summing up ideas• Making connections• Corroborating claims

(continued)

Table 1
(Continued)

GUIDED PRACTICE		
Wikipedia entry for Japanese internment & Google Docs table (Figs. 9–11)	View text screenshots and corresponding think-aloud models for this phase at: http://sites.google.com/site/tiponlinethinkaloudlessons/lesson1-think-aloud	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Refer to online table for list of strategies practiced in this phase
REFLECT		
Google Docs chart with completed rows and summary statement about findings (Fig. 12)	Respond and Reflect (after 15 min): Now that you’ve had time to find additional sources, we can look across all the information we’ve compiled to report an accurate and reliable solution to the challenge. [Discussion ensues until finally the class reaches consensus on an appropriate response that is posted beneath the table on Google Docs—Fig. 12. The group’s response is: “Based on 5 reliable sources, we believe that between 110,000 and 120,000 individuals of Japanese descent were moved to relocation centers in the United States during World War II.”]	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Summing up ideas• Making connections• Corroborating claims

present opportunities for students to engage in curriculum-based online reading activities while learning more about equity, social justice, and the constitutional rights of American citizens.

Integrating Think-Aloud Lessons
Into Online Reading
Comprehension Instruction

A typical think-aloud lesson for online reading comprehension instruction involves three phases: modeling, guided practice, and reflection (see <http://sites.google.com/site/tiponline thinkaloudlessons/lesson-template> for a lesson template). In the modeling phase, teachers typically model the strategies with one computer and a projector as part of a shared reading experience that can involve the whole class or a small group of students. Prior to the lesson, teachers explore anticipated sets of search engine results and informational Web sites. Subsequent think-aloud examples are designed to highlight particular text features, thinking processes, and/or content knowledge necessary for students to complete the information challenge successfully. Effective lessons are designed to: (a) anticipate what students will struggle with most as they approach, navigate, negotiate, monitor, and respond to the online text(s); and (b) offer think-aloud models

of the thinking and reading strategies one would use to scaffold their understanding in these areas.

After students have seen how an expert reader thinks metacognitively to solve a portion of the information challenge, they are encouraged to read on their own laptops (or in a computer lab) in a guided practice activity. Here, students actively take part in reading and thinking alongside the teacher to solve the next part of the online challenge. The teacher moves away gradually, asking questions that prompt students to think-aloud about their own strategy use, and validating student attempts to play a more active role in the process. Toward the end of this phase, students are given an opportunity to work independently (or with a partner) on the remaining part of the challenge.

Finally, in the reflection stage, the group meets back together to share strategies they used and construct a group solution to the posed challenge. Often, this reflection involves composing a response in an online communication interface appropriate to the task, such as e-mail, blogs, or a collaborative word processing document. This phase is useful for modeling appropriate discourse practices that consider tone, purpose, and audience across diverse communication contexts.

Table 1 illustrates how a teacher might think out loud in the modeling phase of how to read efficiently within search engine results and informational websites to locate a specific fact. The

Table 2
Example of a Think-Aloud Lesson Teaching Adolescents How to Read Critically Across Five Online Sources That Portray the Japanese Internment Camp Experience From Diverse Points of View

Texts	Teacher Commentary During the Think-Aloud	Strategies Modeled/Practiced
Lesson 2: Reading Critically to Negotiate Multiple Perspectives Challenge: How do different authors portray the Japanese internment camp experience to readers?		
MODEL		
Webspiration concept map with challenge question and links to sources about Japanese internment (Fig. 13) Webspiration template connected to each of five sources (Fig. 14)	Approach: For this task, I'm asked to form an opinion across five different texts, so I probably won't find a specific answer in any one place. In fact, because the question says "different authors," I'm guessing I might have to compare and contrast different opinions about Japanese internment. In a way, this will be easy because I don't have to search for the five different texts—they are all linked to our concept map [Fig. 13]. But I will probably have to spend some time trying to learn more about the people that wrote each text to better understand why they have the opinions they do. This can be pretty difficult, so I'm going to use this template [Fig. 14] to help me stay focused and organize important information about each text.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Determining a purpose• Making a plan• Anticipating challenges
Source 1: Lt. G. DeWitt's Final Report (Fig. 15)	Navigate and Negotiate: [Teacher models how to read at different locations within DeWitt's report (Fig. 15) and embedded hyperlinks to related websites (Figs. 16–17) for author/sponsor information to locate relevant information and determine the source's trustworthiness]	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Determining important ideas• Evaluating relevance of information within a Web site• Evaluating potential reliability of information within a Web site
Web site: Virtual Museum of San Francisco (Fig. 16) Page with background information about DeWitt's Final Report (Fig. 17)	View corresponding think-alouds for this portion of the lesson at: http://sites.google.com/site/tiponlinethinkaloudlessons/lesson2-think-aloud	
Webspiration template for Lt. General DeWitt's report (Fig. 14)	Monitor and Respond: [Teacher thinks-aloud while entering information into the Webspiration template] Now I need to figure out what motivated the author to write this report and find a quote that best represents the author's point of view about Japanese internment. This means I'm going to have to slow down and really read and think carefully.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rereading to clarify task• Navigating across ideas• Constructing meaning• Sourcing online texts• Summing up ideas• Determining a purpose• Anticipating challenges
Source 1: Lt. G DeWitt's Final Report (Fig. 15)	Navigate and Negotiate: [Returns to the report—Fig. 15]: To do this, I'm going to read carefully while asking myself "What clues can I notice about why this author might be writing to me?" and "What words does the author use to convey his feelings about this topic?" Let me give you some examples. First, the word choices such as "I transmit herewith" and "in recognition of this situation" give clues that this is a formal report rather than an informal letter to the General's relatives, for example. Then, I notice in point 2, the author begins with one short direct statement: "The evacuation was impelled by military necessity." This statement appears to sum up his feelings about the topic quickly and directly. Throughout the next paragraph, the author chooses phrases such as "highly sensitive war installations," "rabidly pro-Japanese," "a menace which had to be dealt with," "compulsory organized mass migration," and "time was of the essence." Words such as these can evoke strong feelings and reinforce his argument in ways that make the reader believe there was no option but to evacuate this perceived threat to national security as soon as possible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Making a plan• Navigating across ideas• Evaluating relevancy of ideas• Detecting agendas• Determining important ideas• Summing up ideas

(continued)

Table 2
(Continued)

MODEL		
Completed Webspiration template for Lt. General DeWitt's report (Fig. 18)	Monitor and Respond: So, let's stop and think now about filling in the template [Fig. 18] in a way that helps us address our initial challenge. How can these ideas help us: (a) identify the author's motivation, (b) select a quote that best portrays this author's feelings about the Japanese internment experience, and (c) provide a short phrase in your own words that sums up this author's point of view? Once we figure that out, we can move on to compare the General's feelings with those of another author from our set of five sources. [Discussion ensues, with the teacher modeling how to move from these tangible word choices to a powerful quote and finally, to a class consensus that the author's justification for Japanese internment might best be summed up with the words " <i>It's better to be safe than sorry.</i> " These ideas are then entered into the Webspiration template in Fig. 18.]	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Summing up ideas• Making connections• Looking deeper• Asking questions• Contributing ideas
GUIDED PRACTICE		
Source 5: A More Perfect Union (Figs. 19–22)	View text screenshots and think-aloud models for this phase at: http://sites.google.com/site/tiponlinethinkaloudlessons/lesson2-think-aloud	Refer to online table for strategies practiced here
REFLECT		
Source 5: A More Perfect Union (2001)—section on Justice (Fig. 23) Webspiration Template for A More Perfect Union (Fig. 24)	Respond and Reflect: Teacher [Ten minutes later]: So, let's regroup and share what you found. [Students share their reflections. Discussion ensues and their answers are posted to the template as shown in Fig. 24.] View student reflections and teacher response at: http://sites.google.com/site/tiponlinethinkaloudlessons/lesson2-think-aloud	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Summing up ideas• Detecting agendas• Making connections• Looking deeper• Contributing ideas

top row identifies the lesson purpose and the curriculum-based information challenge question. The left column contains labels for the multiple texts encountered during the lesson. Due to space constraints, text labels take the place of the actual text, since the teacher quickly moves across many screens of text and images. However, if it is helpful to follow along virtually for a more detailed view of the online reading experience, figures that correspond to a screenshot of each text example (and extended think-alouds for each lesson) can be viewed online at <http://sites.google.com/site/tiponlinethinkaloudlessons/>. The associated teacher's commentary appears in the second column, and the strategies used are in the final column.

After students have been exposed to several think-aloud models for how to efficiently locate relevant and reliable information on the Internet, they should have opportunities to see how expert readers negotiate the challenges of reading

critically within and across multiple sources of online information. Table 2 illustrates how a teacher might think out loud while modeling how to read critically to understand how different authors can differentially shape their portrayal of the Japanese internment camp experience in ways that align with their own perspectives and purposes.

Over the next two class periods, students work with partners to explore the remaining three sources about Japanese internment, summarize their findings about each author's point of view, and participate in a class discussion to compare the different ways that authors portray the Japanese internment camp experience to readers. Gradually, they begin to internalize a metacognitive awareness of the reading and thinking processes required to read both efficiently and critically on the Internet. In addition, because the think-aloud instruction is embedded in curriculum-related goals, students also come to

understand a critical period in American history and how different people can have different experiences around the same event that shape their opinions in important ways. These ideas can prepare today's students for appreciating the diverse perspectives that are very much a part of their globally networked information society.

In conclusion, I have found that my preliminary attempts to offer students think-aloud models and guided practice activities as illustrated in this article help adolescents begin to anticipate challenging online reading situations and carefully think about ways to extend their use of printed text comprehension strategies to Internet reading contexts. Students quickly become engaged in solving information challenges while working collaboratively alongside their peers and they draw on think-aloud models useful for solving one challenge to inform their reading decisions in the next challenge. Over time, think-aloud strategy lessons in online reading environments help students recognize, label, and talk about a range of more and less familiar online cueing systems that are useful for particular reading purposes. In turn, students begin to actively apply additional reading and thinking strategies for effectively comprehending and using the range of informational texts they encounter on the Internet.

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